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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 46 (2012) 800 – 804

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**Procedia**  
Social and Behavioral Sciences

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WCES 2012

# Teaching translation techniques in a university setting: problems and solutions

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## Abstract

Translation is an activity of mediating meaning from a source language into a target language. The ability to choose the correct translation technique is an indispensable skill to translators; therefore it is essential for translation students to be aware of why a particular technique is used. Past literatures in translation studies have shown that although much has been written about the translation process and product, there is very little research done on class dynamics in a translation classroom (Gonzales Davis 2004). This research focuses on the teaching of translation techniques in a translation classroom from the cooperative learning perspective. Preliminary observations discovered that students tend to use the wrong translation techniques when translating from English into Malay. As an intervention, a methodology that is called 'Cooperative Work Procedure' (Gerding-Salas 2000) is adopted in the teaching of translation in a basic translation course offered by the School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The 'Cooperative Work Procedure' promotes positive team work from students and it consists of workshop activities that help translation students to acquire appropriate translation techniques when translating a variety type of texts.

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*Keywords:* Translation classroom, translation techniques, cooperative learning

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## 1. Introduction

This study focuses on an intervention method applied to students in a basic translation course in a university setting. Preliminary observations have shown that these students tend to use literal translation techniques when translating texts from English into Malay. Literal translation is accomplished word by word, without considering the meaning and context of the text. The intervention methodology used in this study is known as 'Cooperative Work Procedure' (Gerding-Salas 2000). This methodology was conducted in the translation class to reinforce students' learning of the translation techniques proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), namely calque, borrowing, literal translation, transposition, modulation, functional equivalence, and adaptation.

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This study had the following aims:

1. To describe respondents' perspectives on the cooperative learning method adopted in the translation class.
2. To determine, based on the respondents' translation work and short reports whether they learned the translation techniques taught in class.
3. To discuss the effectiveness of the cooperative learning approach in a translation classroom.

## **2. Cooperative Learning in a Translation Classroom**

Cooperative learning, or CL, is one of the most commonly used forms of active pedagogy. CL represents the most carefully structured end of the collaborative learning continuum. Instruction involves small groups of students who work together to maximise their own and each other's learning while the group's learning is structured around defined tasks or problems (Smith & MacGregor 1992, cited in Rodger et al. 2007) and Ball and Pelco (2006). In the field of translation teaching, little research has been conducted on cooperative learning. An exception is Gerding-Salas's (2000) recommendation for structured workshop activities called the 'Cooperative Work Procedure'. This structured workshop includes a step-by-step procedure that has been proven successful in terms of students' motivation, productivity and work quality. The most recent application of the cooperative approach in a translation classroom was conducted by the research team of Stewart, Orban and Kornelius (2010). This research group called the use of the cooperative method in a translation class 'cooperative translation'. Students are placed in groups of three to four and they complete a translation task in a realistic professional translation environment. One of the main objectives of this research is to examine translation units in students' work. Stewart et al. (2010) claim that cooperative translation receives positive responses from students and is well suited for translating ordinary texts into the translator's native language. Gerding-Salas's workshop activities are adopted in this study because the suggested steps for workshop activities are well presented and easily adopted in any translation classroom.

## **3. Methodology**

This study utilised quantitative and qualitative study methods. The quantitative study used a questionnaire conducted with 43 respondents who were students in a basic translation course at the School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. A week prior to the questionnaire session, the respondents performed translation work in groups of two to three students, but they were not taught to use different types of translation techniques. However the respondents had used several techniques in their translation practice. This study was conducted after the students had learned the translation techniques proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) in an hour long lecture. The respondents were divided into groups of three to four students and were given a text titled 'The Best of Rome', an English descriptive text on visiting Rome, Italy taken from a magazine. The respondents were required to translate the text into Malay in their groups. In addition to translating the text into Malay, the respondents were also required to discuss and write a short report on the translation techniques used in their work. The translation activities were those recommended by Gerding-Salas (2000), where these included selecting suitable texts for translation and reading the text at least twice, including a deep reading. The respondents then performed a preliminary translation. After the first version was completed, the students edited their translation and discussed it with the other group members. As a meta cognitive activity, the respondents analysed the translation strategies and procedures used and recorded this analysis in their short reports.

### *3.1 Quantitative method*

In a follow-up two-hour tutorial session, the respondents completed the questionnaires after translating the text and discussing the translation techniques with their group members. Eighteen items on the questionnaire addressed the seven components necessary to assess cooperative learning such as group processing, motivation, competition,

dependability, accountability, interactivity and the use of collaborative skills, based on Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1991, cited in Tsay and Brady 2010).

### 3.2 Qualitative method

The qualitative methods included document analyses of students' translations and short reports of the translation techniques used in their work. The respondents were required to email their translation work and the short report to the teacher / researcher.

### 3.3 Results

Table 1: The percentage of working style preferred by respondents in a translation classroom

Working style in a translation classroom	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Prefer to work individually	0	14	51.2	34.9
Prefer pair work	4.7	4.7	39.5	51.2
Prefer group work	44.2	48.8	7	0
Prefer 2 to 3 than 4 to 5 in a group	11.6	18.6	53.5	16.3

The findings showed mixed responses towards cooperative learning. In general, a majority of the students preferred group work, but a significant number of the respondents indicated that they also favoured working alone. Table 1 displays the percentages of preferred working styles in the translation classroom. Most of the respondents preferred to work alone (51.2% Agree and 34.9% Strongly Agree). When asked whether they liked working in pairs, the responses show that most of the respondents liked the idea of working in pairs (39.5% Agree and 51.2% Strongly Agree). As shown in Table 1, it is not surprising that most of the respondents did not favour group work with high percentage responding Strongly Disagree (44.2%) and Disagree (48.8%) to the statement 'I like to do translation in groups'. Table 2 presents the positive responses from respondents towards CL.

Table 2: The percentage of positive responses on cooperative learning or group work

Positive responses on cooperative learning in translation classroom	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Provide freedom for discussion	2.3	11.6	37.2	48.8
Enable members to understand source text better	2.3	0	30.2	67.4
Promote friendship among members	34.9	41.9	20.9	2.3
Motivate members to speak up	4.7	4.7	76.7	14
Enables discussion	4.7	27.9	46.5	2.9
Enjoy the translation discussion	2.3	0	34.9	62.8
The ability of exchanging ideas	0	4.7	30.2	65.1
Translating becomes easier	0	18.6	44.2	37.2
The opportunity to correct other members' mistakes	0	14	55.8	30.2
All members aim for good grades	2.3	18.6	39.5	39.5

Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed that group work provides freedom for discussion of their translation work. The majority of the respondents also agreed that group work enabled the group members to discuss the source text in the translation task. This enabled the students to better understand the source text prior to translating it. Although the respondents agreed with the benefits of group work for translation, they did not agree that group work promoted friendship among members, with 34.9% responding Strongly Disagree and 41.9% responding Disagree to the statement 'Working in a group promotes friendship'. Table 2 also shows that a majority of the respondents actually enjoyed discussing their translation work with 34.9% responding Agree and 62.8% responding Strongly Agree to the statement 'Discussion of the translation work is what I enjoy most'. The respondents were

also positive towards the ability to exchange ideas in group work, with a majority agreeing with the statement ‘ I like to exchange ideas on translation work with friends in my group ’. Table 2 also indicates that the respondents agreed that translation became easier when it was performed in a group. The respondents appreciated the opportunity to correct their friends’ mistakes with 55.8% responding Agree and 30.2% responding Strongly Agree to the statement ‘I like the opportunity to correct my classmates’ mistakes’. The respondents were aware that their group members had similar goals of receiving good grades with 39.5% of students responding to Agree and 39.5% responding Strongly Agree to the statement ‘I know that my friends in the same group also aim to get a good grade for the translation course’.

Table 3: The percentage of negative responses on cooperative learning or group work

Negative responses on cooperative learning in translation classroom	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Too noisy	4.7	27.9	46.5	20.9
Some members do not contribute in the discussion	4.7	0	39.5	55.8
Group work is difficult	9.3	34.9	39.5	16.3

Table 3 shows the percentage of negative responses to cooperative learning. A majority of the respondents found the class too noisy during group work, with the majority agreeing with the statement ‘I don’t like to work in a group because the class gets so noisy’. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents agreed that some group members did not contribute to the discussion. A high percentage of respondents agreed with the statement ‘Translating a text with a group of friends is difficult’. The respondents’ translation work and short reports showed that they understood and applied the correct translation techniques. Most of the reports demonstrated that the respondents adopted the correct translation techniques in their work and the translation examples showed that the respondents understood what was taught in the class. The table below shows the translation techniques used by the students and some examples of their translations.

Table 4: Translation techniques used by the students and the examples

Translation Techniques	Examples
1. Borrowing	ST: Inside, you’ll see the tomb of the sublime Renaissance artist, Raphael. TT: <i>Di dalamnya, anda akan melihat makam pelukis tersohor zaman Renaissance, Raphael</i>
2. Transposition	ST: To see all the displays, you’ll have to walk about 7km! TT: <i>Keseluruhan karya seni di muzium tersebut mengambil kira-kira 7 kilometer berjalan kaki.</i>
3. Modulation	ST: ...for fresh air TT: <i>...menghirup udara segar</i>

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings indicated mixed responses towards cooperative learning. In general, a majority of the students preferred group work but a significant number of the respondents indicated they favoured working alone. The students’ responses suggested that they preferred smaller groups of 2 to 3 members compared to groups of 4 to 5 members. This finding clearly shows that the respondents can be categorised competitive learners, who are more individualistic than cooperative learners.

The findings also indicated that a majority of the respondents enjoyed discussing their translation work with their classmates although they disliked the idea of working in groups. This is a positive sign that discussion is beneficial to translation class. The respondents were also positive towards the ability to exchange ideas in a group and they found translation became easier when it was performed in group work. This finding is in accordance with Gerding-

Salas's (2000) view that students' ability to discuss their translation techniques demonstrates a level of meta cognitive ability. Kussmaul (1995, cited in Gerding Salas 2000) claims, 'The ability to discuss translations in an objective way is central to a translator's competence'.

The study found that the respondents appreciated the opportunity to correct their friends' mistakes and were aware that the other members in their group shared their goal of achieving good grades. This finding clearly shows that the respondents were highly competitive and driven to achieve good grades. The respondents were also positive towards the ability to exchange ideas in group work. Again, this finding clearly shows that the respondents were highly competitive and very driven to achieve good grades. Although the respondents acknowledged the benefits of group work for translation, they did not agree that group work promotes friendship among members. This finding shows that the respondents were highly focussed in their translation task, with no opportunities for fostering friendship. The respondents also agreed that group work motivated the members to discuss their translation work. The respondents' translation work and short reports showed that they understood and applied the correct translation techniques. Most of the reports indicated that the respondents adopted the correct translation techniques in their work, and the translation examples showed that the respondents understood what was taught in class.

The quantitative and qualitative research findings indicate that cooperative learning is suitable for use in a translation class. The students' translation work and short reports showed that they were able to adopt the translation techniques in their work. The findings also suggest that the respondents enjoyed discussing their translation work in class. The students did not enjoy performing translation work in large groups (3-4 students), preferring smaller group (2-3 students). In this study, the students exhibited an individualistic and competitive learning style. However the questionnaire revealed that the students were aware of the positive aspects of group work. The students found that group work encouraged discussion and the exchange of ideas. Group work also made it easier for the students to understand the source text and allowed them to correct their friends' mistakes. The students had negative responses to group work when the class became too noisy and some of their friends did not contribute to the discussion.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) for funding the Plan and Action Research (PTS-2011-069) and special mention also goes to students of SKVT1213 and SKVT1223 for participating in the study.

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